1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

115 584 [949] Bayo knew the bush as he knew the river. At one point he stopped and, clipping off a long, slender branch with his bush knife, he trimmed it and began to strike at a palm tree. He was after maripa nuts, and soon they began to pelt the ground. Their pink, slightly astringent meat was highly prized by the Bush Negroes as a delicacy, and the white man also found them good. Both munched them as they walked farther into the bush. It was a good time to speak of Bayo's marriage.

"Your mother said you needed to work hard before marrying."

"Ai."

"Is it money you need?"

"Much money, and goods besides."

"What will your girl do with all this money and all of these goods?"

"They are not all for her. She would have me without them. It is her mother who must get things, too."

That Bayo was attractive to women, we had often seen, but that his betrothed would have him without the wealth demanded for her by right of whatever position her family held, seemed doubtful. However, this was not the time to argue the point.

"Your girl is still young. Do girls her age know enough to choose a man?"

The question brought us to the story of how Bayo became betrothed.

His girl, he told us, was of good family. She had lived in his village, because her mother at marriage had come to live with her husband at Djamungo, but a few years after Bayo had become betrothed to the girl, his mother's sister took her away to the family seat up the river.

"Do you care for your girl, Bayo?"

"*M'an sabi, Bak'a*—I do not know. We shall see how we [831] get on. But her family is good, and they are looking after her chastity, as families who have position do."

"What if you don't get on after you are married?"

● 586 "We will separate. She will go back to her own family. Sometimes, if a man doesn't like a woman too much, and

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

she doesn't make children, then he can send her back. But most often it is the woman who goes away."

When the wife left the home her husband had built for her and went to her family, he had to go to her village and plead for her return, while her relations berated him soundly for his behavior toward their kin. If he had not mistreated her badly, the family would urge her to return to him, and so great would that pressure be that she would have to go. But Bayo again repeated that this did not happen often. If a woman left her husband and he failed to come for her, they were divorced. She could not remarry until three months had passed.

But Bayo was more interested in marriage than in divorce, and the talk again turned to his betrothal.

His mother and her brothers had decided upon the match. His uncles had gone to the family of the girl, and talked with her mother's brothers. Her people called a family krutu to decide whether Bayo was qualified to be a suitable husband for this young member of their family.

"Were you there?"

"No. It was a krutu of her family. But I know how they talk at these krutu, for when my sister was promised in marriage my own family had a krutu, and I sat and listened. Anybody who knew anything bad about my brother-in-law or his family told of it. They talk much at these krutu. The woman you met at Djamungo talked when the men talked, and she talked when the women talked," he finished with a laugh, as though it were a relief to him to know that at least she had had no say when his girl's family had gathered to look into his own family position, and his personal habits of work, and the gifts the gods had given him.

At this krutu of the girl's family, Bayo had, however, been thoroughly discussed. Was he a good worker? Could he hunt well? How did he behave in strange villages? At his initiation had the gods come strong to him? Had he done anything that his wife's family would later be ashamed of?

The white man wondered about the kunu which hung over Bayo's family, the kunu of incest, the deadliest of all

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

181 one feels any grudge against society. There is small temptation to theft. There are, therefore, no questions of capital and labour, no leisure class, no organized industries, no exploitation either of men or of raw materials, no banks to rob, no checks to forge. Under such conditions economic crimes are practically eliminated. Man lives off the jungle and the streams which intersect it, and there are at his disposal uncounted miles of stream and of jungle. Such crimes as exist [674 among the human inhabitants of these forests arise chiefly 578] in quarrels over women. But where divorce is free and in- [586 stantaneous, and sexual relationships are taken lightly, even 833] the difficulties between men and women are enormously simplified.

114 And as these Djukas stood curiously staring outside the prison gates of St. Laurent, they seemed to me to stand in judgment. When I watched them get into their canoes and paddle upstream, returning to their green jungle fastnesses, and heard them call to one another from canoe to canoe, and heard their laughter ring out across the sunlit water, I felt that they went back to the forest, well content that their slave ancestors of two hundred years ago had fled from the white man and all his ways, back to the jungle, there to lead the primitive life of their African forbears.

I had gone to French Guiana to study the convict life of the Devil's Island Penal Colony. And when that had been completed, my husband and I made a journey through the interior of Dutch Guiana, travelling by the streams and trails used by fugitives from the French prisons. This is how we

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

836 It is indulged in as naturally as the other bodily functions.

581 "Marriage" is a convenient term for describing cohabitation among the Djukas, but it must be remembered that to them marriage is a purely economic institution. There is little ceremony. No one objects to getting married, because divorce is instantaneous and easy. The bonds of marriage are loose, and adultery, to use our harsh term, is customary.

584 Courting consists in presenting the prospective bride with elaborate wood carvings of useful implements. This wood carving has been developed by the Djukas to a high point of artistic perfection, as can be seen from the illustrative specimens, of which more will be said later. The approaching marriage is not looked upon as a departure from the maternal group; it is simply an arrangement for providing the man with a cook and the woman with children. The marriage of a captain or a Granman differs in no wise from any other; no especial care is taken of his bride.

We encountered two varieties of the process of choosing a husband. In the first, the girl has little to say, her husband being selected for her by her parents. In the second and more frequent practice the woman marries the man of her own choice, the parents making sure that the intended husband is a good provider. But since every Djuka buck is trained to the jungle crafts from childhood, this requirement can almost be taken for granted.

582 The husband marries frequently. He may marry outside of his village, or outside of his lo, but never outside of the tribe. Marriage requires a bride price, consisting of pieces of

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

342 556 ings inside, to give the idea of affluence. The women looking into the dim interior are awed by the numerous boxes. They are usually empty, however.

837 684 When men go away on hunting or fishing trips, adultery frequently occurs. If it is discovered by the husband's family, they seize the wife and beat her. Her own family rushes to her aid, and a general mêlée ensues. The village is soon in [622] an uproar, and to the captain belongs the unpleasant and thankless task of stopping the fight. There is considerable excitement for a few minutes. Many a hot listless evening is provided with a momentary thrill because someone's wife has been careless. After the mêlée the wife is usually forgiven, and the village returns to its normal routine.

● 586 Divorce is easy. A married woman merely informs the bosseia and captain, and moves out of her husband's hut, going back to her parents or to her lover. Even this formality may be dispensed with if she simply locks the door and refuses to let her husband enter. There is an heroic simplicity to this procedure. The husband may do the same, divorcing any one of his wives without assigning any reason for his action. The parting—we hesitate to distinguish it as a divorce—is usually on the woman's initiative; men leave their wives not so often as their wives leave them. Usually a husband will endure a wife until domestic dissension makes his life unbearable. Among women the motives for divorce vary; a husband's impotence is a very adequate reason, for of all masculine virtues the Djuka women esteem virility the most. Impotence seems to be common among primitive peoples after

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

the age of about thirty-five. Another motive for separation is a husband's inadequacy as a hunter, fisher, and provider. Or the woman may simply be bored with him and like some other man better. The husband is liable to be teased a bit by his friends, but after a few days he forgets and marries again.

Open licentiousness or sexual suggestiveness is never seen in public. The personal modesty of the Djukas has already been noted. Exposure of themselves, or public intercourse, such as is common in some tribes in Africa, never occurs. After the dances, for instance, no open promiscuousness occurred. There is one orgiastic dance known as the *ogalusa*, which means "mating like loose hogs."

Two aphrodisiacs are used liberally by the natives. One is prepared by infusing the bark of a bush vine called *debbil dour* with water or weak alcohol. The liquid when drunk is supposed to give an erection of several hours' duration. Some of it was brought back by the expedition and tried on laboratory animals, with no effect. It is well known, however, that witch doctors will substitute other roots or herbs when giving their medicines to white men.

Another aphrodisiac that we found used among the Aucaners is the seed of the mucca-mucca plant, which grows on the banks of most of the rivers of the colonies. The seed is mashed into fragments and then inserted into the urethra. This acts as a tremendous irritant and is supposed to bring about erections of long duration. If used frequently, a persistent and disagreeable type of urethritis is produced.

At the hospital near the mines of the Surinam Bauxite

/14 cont./

584 and, once this has been promised, she does indeed continue to be regarded specifically as the betrothed of the person who made the request. As soon as she is marriageable, she is handed over to her man with or without her consent, and it may be regarded as a rare case when such a promise is broken.

[431] The man to whom she is promised sometimes does not see his future wife before the occasion of her betrothal, but usually he is concerned with her upbringing and from time to time gives her presents consisting of money, pantjes, and corals.

[591] Some take the girl promised to them even when she is only three or four years old in order to rear her further.

[672] [682] The promising of newborn girls takes place for the most part when there are obligations between parents, as was reported in Chapter III, and in the case of enslavement which is done to one [567] family by another in case of poisoning, and so forth.

• 586 It is an everyday occurrence that a woman leaves her husband or a man his wife for another.

595 Polygyny is much practiced, and among my workers I know several who have three or four wives, most of whom are very young. Some, however, have only one wife.

It is noteworthy that all the wives sleep with the man in one hut, while in addition he perhaps keeps with him a girl whom he [513] is bringing up to be his wife. One wife will be /15/ with him in the hammock and lies with her feet at the head end of the man and the latter in turn with his feet at the head end of the women, while the other women sleep in their hammocks.

[484] If a Bush Negro goes out, be it to celebrate a festival or in order to float wood to the town, he takes all his wives with him; only in case of illness do they remain behind.

His wives get money separately, and therefore they must also separately provide for his food, so that one cooks the food in the morning, another at midday, a third in the evening, etc. [578] This way of life and their jealous nature frequently bring about household quarrels that rarely end in any way other than bloody fights.

585 Upon the conclusion of a marriage the man is obligated to 583 give the parents of the girl as a marriage portion a long, broad,

/15 cont./

585 white cotton sleeping blanket, various colored cloths and panties,
[583] some earthenware, such as bowls and plates, iron pots and pans, and the like, while he is obligated on the occasion to provide for an ample supply of strong drink and sugar wine.

They do not have festivities, games, or dancing in connection with their marriages.

• 586 If a marriage is dissolved, then each of the two parties again goes to his own family; in case those concerned in it and the elders disapprove of this, however, it happens that man and wife are forced to continue to live with each other, especially when there are no substantial reasons and grievances.

593 The man is obligated to provide his wife or his wives with food, clothing, and ornament; she, to follow the man everywhere, to cook for him, to wash, and to take care of the housekeeping.

264 The wives are neat in an exemplary fashion; plates, bowls,
252 and pans are always kept extremely clean, and they also see to it that everything is extremely clean in connection with cooking.

841 If they find themselves in a period of menstruation, they
302 indicate this immediately to the husband by withdrawing from his dwelling and staying in seclusion with other women; they neither cook nor do the least thing for him in this state, do not even come within sight of him, and remain secluded to the end; when they have cleaned and dressed themselves, they decorate their shoulders and arms with white stripes as a token /16/ that they have again
[384] returned to their normal state. The stripes are made by mixing
[824] pounded adrue (1) with ground chalk and water.

1. A tuberous root-stalk from the Cyperus rotundus L.

Sometimes they also smear the forehead and the neck in this way and appear thus before their husbands.

841 During their seclusion another woman, who is a member of
571 the family or possibly a female friend, daily prepares and brings the
252 food, which, however, is at the expense of the secluded wife. They perform this service for each other mutually.

/510 cont./

relatives, nor any power of the man over the woman, nor even household cohabitation. The man and the woman each reside in the village of their maternal kin. The man goes to live with his wife from time to time, providing her with the imported commodities that she needs, notably salt, kerosene, cloth, and utensils, and felling trees for the clearings which she will exploit for the benefit of the household.

Divorce is entirely free. Unions are not very stable, mainly on account of the woman. Numbers of women are divorced four to five times during their lives.

The grand man, chief of the tribe, exercises over the Boni a power which is more religious than political.

The Boni are a pirogue-people. For more than a century they have been living by using their canoes for the benefit of gold-seekers and exploiting miners. The decline of gold extraction is depriving them more and more of their traditional resources. Some of them are emigrating temporarily to the coastal lumberyards. But all of them remain faithful to their villages and to their customs.

/511/

The Oayana Indians (Roucouyennes /Roucuyen/). These Indians of the Caribe /Carib/ ethnic group have had only a few direct contacts with European civilization and still represent without alteration the human type which populated Guiana before the arrival of the Europeans. On encountering the Refugee Blacks, the Indians of the Guianese forest have been steadily and rapidly declining. Estimated at 20,000 at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Indians of French Guiana are now no more than about a thousand. In addition there must be included in this number 700 persons (Galibi and Arawak) who have been protected by their habitat in the savannas of the coast where malaria is less deadly than in the interior.

The accounts of travelers and the censuses made notably in 1720, 1788, 1787, and 1815 allow one to follow with precision the destruction of the autochthonous population since the first settlement of the Europeans in Guiana (2).

2. Dr. André Saussa, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

163
165 [For additional demographic and social information, see the "Table of the Population
429 of the Boni Villages," on pp. 429-439, category 116. Included are data on the number
431 of children per woman, the number of deaths by age and sex, the name of the guardian
432 (usually, but not necessarily a parent) who was responsible for raising a particular
433 individual, personal names of the Boni, marital residence and residence changes by
434 specific individuals, marriage practices, including polygynous unions and secondary
435 marriages, cases of divorce, and lineage/sib affiliations of each individual.]
491
493
505
513
514

/36 cont./

1714 571 The formation of patrilineages must have been hampered by numerous divorces; in addition, in case of divorce, the wife unquestionably aspired to take her children with her, not recognizing any contract between the two groups of kin which might be able to affect her free will; one can also be certain that the children, if consulted, must have followed their mother in most cases and joined their maternal kin group. This tendency remains perfectly observable in our day; we shall see all its importance when we study how the children are raised and what marriage is exercised upon them. [586]

Now there is no patrilineage conceivable if, in case of divorce, the children do not stay with the father. Patrilineal societies exist in which the wife is free, were it only the Fesse society, where divorces are very frequent. But African custom has it that in a patrilineal system, by reason of payment of the dowry, the wife's kin lose all rights over the children. They have entered the man's kin group and his ancestral cult.

The formation of matrilineal and patrilocal groupings must also have collided with analogous difficulties, the women not willingly leaving their village of origin.

One can rather easily imagine that in the initial period of the formation of the /37/ new tribes, the different matrimonial systems coexisted; then the patrilocal groups, less viable, progressively broke up, while the present custom was being established.

195 643 This point of view is confirmed by an exact piece of information collected at the end of the 19th century by the explorer Coudreau. Upon the death of Agom, son of Boni, it was his son Gongo who succeeded him. But after the death of Gongo, the succession went according to the matrilineal system.

583 [591] Another important aspect of the matrimonial system of the Refugee Blacks is the absence of any compensation or payment. Even if it happens that a woman leaves her lineage permanently in order to settle in her husband's village and found a family there

/To cont./

613 In 1957 the Dikan lineage was practically extinct. There remained only Grand Man Dilo and his elder brother Samalobi, very old.

[529] The present grand man does not know the genealogy of his lineage beyond his grandmother. /Fig. 14 appears here./ /71/

[548] At the death of Awonsay it was Samalobi, eldest of Awonsay's classificatory nephews, who was to be named; but the French administration thought they had to oppose it, judging him too old; he yielded with good grace.

613 Samalobi, the ancestor, the patriarch of the Boni, died
[615] in May, 1957 at over 100 years old. Although very weakened by
[594] his infirmities and nearly blind, he kept great prestige and no important decision was made without his consent.

1973 The son of Ajuta, companion of Crevaux. He had retained an exact memory of the explorer whom he had accompanied during part of his trip in 1877. It is thanks to his memories that Crevaux's prestige has remained so great on the Maroni.

613 The grand man judges without appeal disputes between
[692] members of different lineages. Truly serious affairs are extremely
[594] rare, if one keeps in mind that:
613
[583] --Disputes over the payment of dowry, paying it back in
[584] case of divorce, and the assignment of the children, which form the main part of the cases argued before ordinary African jurisdictions, do not exist among the Saramaca Bushs;

613

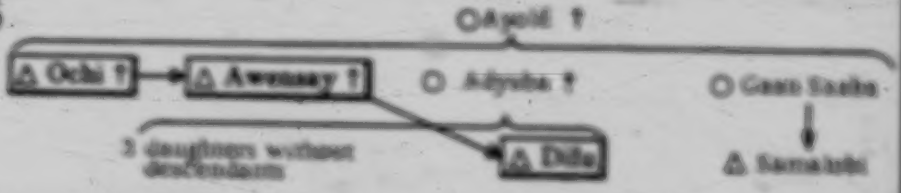

Fig. 14. Filiation of the last three grand men of the Boni.

F13 cont. /

The present grand man, contrary to his predecessors, has only one wife. She is dressed like the other women and works at her clearing like everyone else. */14/* but her marriage to the grand man imposes special obligations on her: she can not divorce him; neither can he repudiate her.

The attitude of the Saut toward the grand man is a curious mixture of respect and disparagement. They regard him as the living symbol of their nation, and each one reacts as if it were a personal insult an outsider having an incorrect attitude toward him. But their undisciplined spirit kicks up at the measures he is obliged to take to make them respect customary law, and even the authority of a patient and benevolent man like Grand Man Dila is not willingly accepted. As a matter of fact, the Saut stand for the authority of the grand man as they adhere to the worship of their gods, by the feeling of an absolute and incurable necessity; in their minds the grand man is above all the priest of Odun; if the grand man were not there, they would be without defense against the wisiman, without recourse against the vengeance exercised by the yanta of the dead of other lineages.

The political power of the grand man is entirely based on these beliefs, and if they were to collapse, he would disappear with them. Nobody would submit to any other law than that of the lineage, founded upon fear of the ancestors.

The Saut kunu. This is the assembly of the men, without distinction of age (1) or kinship; this council (Saut = law) constitutes

> 1. There is no precise rule for fixing the age from which an adolescent may sit in this council. It is apparently when he has reached full physical development and earns his living by his own efforts, about 18 to 20 years. He does not have to be married.

the legal expression of the Saut.

/127 cont./

are his or not, he maintains them indirectly by maintaining his wife. He has only precarious authority. Every connection with the children disappears in case of divorce.

Guardianship is often exercised by the maternal grandmother, by an aunt, or even by an older sister.

If the maternal grandmother (or the great-grandmother if she is still living) insists on bringing up a child, the mother cannot refuse; one sees a rather large number of cases of women who have only one child and have given it to their mother to raise; it is true that since they live together, it is not a great sacrifice for the mother.

Thus one sees women over 70 years old, having had ten children or so, bringing up three or four of their grandchildren. The ancestress of Assi village, Kuuba († 1957), after having had 12 children, brought up about ten of her children and grandchildren during the course of her long existence; when she died in 1957 at 100 years of age, she was still raising a child, one of her great-grandsons 12 years old. Of course she had not been working any more for a long time and was fed by her family, as the child was. But it was she who held the power of guardianship over him.

If it is the father who is charged with the child's education, he takes him into his own maternal family. His sisters will help him to bring up the child as long as he needs the presence of a woman.

From then on the father will exercise guardianship corresponding to that which the mother usually exercises under the responsibility of the uncles.

Sometimes a man is seen bringing up a daughter. Generally speaking, if a man /128/ has had three or more children by one woman, it is considered normal for him to be given one to raise, but that does not constitute a right; he cannot demand anything.

/137 cont./

531 necessary food) than by a sentimental motive. It is very rare to meet among them the appearance of sincere and lasting love for a woman; that is sometimes seen, but it is the exception.

562 It is not enough to say that they have few emotional feelings with respect to women. In the conversations heard in the evening around the campfires a deep contempt is expressed on this subject; they even speak of the Boni women as of a foreign and almost enemy nation; they consider them besides as half irresponsible. This attitude shows through in the custom concern-
[484] ing adultery, which decrees that the lover be beaten but not the wife.

581 Among the Refugee Blacks marriage is in fact a contract of maintenance between a man and woman, which provides for the execution of such-and-such work by the one for the benefit of the other, and for the wife the obligation to be faithful.
• [584] This contract can be cancelled unilaterally without any sort of
[585] indemnity. It does not directly involve the relatives of the spouses; it involves them only in case of the death of one spouse,
[613] for the surviving spouse must /138/ put up with the subservience of mourning. It is principally for this reason that a marriage must be officially known by both lineages, and that a divorce must be proclaimed without delay.

592 Exogamy. Marriage is forbidden between persons of the same
613 lineage. In expressing this prohibition the Refugee Blacks
614 employ the word bee (lineage in the restricted sense) and not the word lo.

613 As we have seen in studying the situation of the various lineages, the various Boni kin groups follow different rules in this regard:

--The Djo lineage, which forms only one single group from the genealogical point of view, does not allow marriage between its members;

/140 cont./

Whatever its origin, we should note that the Saramaka custom has no relation, as far as its legal content is concerned, to the levirate, nor to the inheritance of widows as it is practiced in numerous African societies. It does not correspond in any way to the transmission of a right over the widow, since this right does not exist; it probably results from the idea that the widow is better protected from the effects of the dead man's jealousy if she marries one of his brothers. Besides, she may choose from among all his classificatory brothers, in the matrilineage as in the patrilineage, which assures her of a wide choice. She can break the union without any compensation after some months of living together and resume complete liberty.

Statistics of marriages between kin groups. We have listed on the table opposite, the total unions for which we have been able to identify with certainty the kinship of the spouses, including those broken by divorce and death. Their total number is 411.

The table emphasizes the more or less great frequency of unions between /141/ /table appears here/ /142/ such-and-such kin groups, as well as the frequency of unions between Boni women and men of other tribes, DJUKA PARAMAKA, and SARAMAKA.

Out of a total of 411 unions of Boni women one notes:
-- 327 with BONI (80%);
-- 50 with DJUKA (12%);
-- 21 with SARAMAKA (5%);
-- 5 with PARAMAKA (1%);
-- 8 with Creoles from Suriname (2%).

The proportion of intertribal marriages (20%) is high; it results from the frequent presence on the Marowijne of Djuka or Saramaka boatmen coming to carry on transport. The reciprocal is not true; marriages between Boni men and women

[Text Continues on P 209]

/150 cont./

593 342 461 [198] Nothing marks better the small place the conjugal bond has in a man's life; imagine the torture which this forced living and crowding together represent for each of these women! The Boni of today, much richer than their ancestors and better equipped with tools, are singularly lazier in building houses; no longer is anyone seen to sculpture and decorate the façades lovingly; when a man, after many recriminations, decides to build a house for his wife, he is content most of the time now with a simple shelter with plaited walls, which does not require 30 days work.

595 As we have said, each man may take as many wives as he wishes, on condition that he can supply their needs; but in practice the maintenance of a household is so heavy a load that most men have only one or two wives; only one to our knowledge has three. In fact, it is contrary to custom to free oneself by paying for work which one must do for one's wife. We have never heard it said that a rich man (many of them have hundreds of thousands of francs in savings) paid money in place of a piece of work, or paid someone to do it for him. The furnishing of imported objects is particularly burdensome, especially cloth, kitchen utensils (Boni women are infatuated with aluminum objects), and occasionally jewels. The Boni conceded in 1958 that the maintenance of a wife amounted to 30 to 40 thousand francs a year at least. If one considers that a hard-working man earned about 120,000 francs a year, that he spent 30 to 40 thousand francs a year for himself, that he often had /151/ in addition to provide for the needs of his aged parents and share the expenses of the festivals of the lineage, one sees that he could not have more than two wives at the same time. As for less hard-working men, who have no more than 60 to 80 thousand francs a year in ready money, they have a great deal of trouble in facing the maintenance of a single household, and many divorces have no other cause.

593 [461] [556] [454] [439] [511] [434] [511] [695] [434] [511] [586]

/151 cont./

595 Sticking to statistics, one could say that the Refugee Blacks are monogamous in the proportion of 85 per cent. But 581 it is an apparent monogamy, for unions are not stable; their • 586 average duration is about ten years; in fact the Refugee Blacks are practicing polygamy over a period of time.

595 A man who takes another wife apologizes to the first and gives her a liter of tafia, asking her to live on good terms with [584] the co-wife. A certain number of wives do not accept co-wives and get divorced.

589 Most men have had, in general, four or five wives 586 succesively. Most of the time these marriages have been 163 broken by the wife. /152/

Example S... (65 years old in 1957) had at least seven wives:

-- Nanay (Dip. II)†	1 child	divorced
Baakauman (K)†	3 children	•
1 Paramaka woman	1 child dead	•
Saumè (Dip. I)	1 child	•
Paata (Boniville)	no children	•
Emma (Asisi-Aw.B.)	no children	•
Masé (K)	•	marriage extant in 1958

Kwami (50 years old in 1958) had four wives:

-- Apinda (Asisi)	no children	divorced
Saayé (Dip. I)	several children	•
Do (Lapé)	1 child dead	•
Noémi (Asisi-Aw.B.)	1 child	marriage extant in 1958

159 582 Example of the family life of G... (50 years old in 1958).

159 About 1935 G... married M... (Kotika), a serious-minded and 837 intelligent woman who was very attached to him. Neverthe- [847] less, about the same time he had a clandestine affair with S.... classificatory sister of M.... whom he made pregnant (abortion).

159
595
[837]
[613]

/152 cont./

Since it is forbidden to have two wives at the same time in the same lineage, that produced a scandal and his uncles had to intervene so that he would not be beaten.

After that, without leaving M...., he took officially another wife, A... (Papalston). They lived together nearly [839] eight years, but A... began to deceive him while he was on a [586] trip. The first time, he only threatened her; the third time he repudiated her.

[619] Again he officially took another wife, T...., a Djuka from the Tapanahoni.

[589] A year later A...., who wished she had him back, had her uncles intervene so that she might come back into his favor. G...., through deference to her uncles, accepted against his will.

Thus he found himself engaged in three unions, M.... A...., and T.... He thought this situation was leading him to [586] ruin and sacrificed T... although he had no fault to find with her.

[586] Some time afterward A... began to deceive him again and he repudiated her once and for all.

Finally he took a last wife, B... (Asisi), by whom he had no children.

On each of these undertakings he had to submit to violent scenes by his first wife M...., who was very attached to him and would have liked to keep him for herself alone. Nevertheless, she never divorced him and did not provoke difficulties with her co-wives.

[542] He had a child by M... after more than 15 years of sterile marriage.

In 1958 G... was living with M... and B...., who got along well together. He was not looking for any more new adventures.

/153 cont./
with repudiation in case of a second offense. The rule is to repudiate her, under pain of ridicule.

In 1951 G..., of Kotika village, was informed that his wife A..., of Asisi village, 25 years old, was deceiving him with a boy of the same age named K.... The first time he encountered K in a village he took issue with him; K... confessed without difficulty. G... delivered a strong punch which threw him to the ground, and that was all. He did not administer any punishment to his wife but immediately let her know that he was repudiating her. Some time after, K... asked to be reconciled with him. He asked his pardon and gave him a bottle of tafia (this is obligatory for reconciliation). Since, the two men have again been friends.

It also happens that the grand man levies a more or less stiff fine on the guilty man.

According to the elders, adultery was rare in former times. If a woman was tired of her husband, she divorced him openly, but she did not deceive him. Nowadays it seems to be rather frequent.

Divorce. The Refugee Blacks divorce each other as easily as they join together; in general it is the woman who decides to break up the union because she finds her husband too poor, too lazy, or simply because she wants to change. /154/

In the case of divorce the woman keeps all that her husband has given to her or made for her (utensils, house, boat), but of course the man keeps all his own belongings; this rupture changes nothing about the possession of property since no object was owned jointly.

The rule is the following: at the time of the marriage the man puts down symbolically several personal objects (fabrics, utensils) in the woman's home. As long as these objects are in her home the marriage remains in force, the wife is held to fidelity or at the very least, if there is adultery, it is regarded as such and entails the sanctions related above.

/154 cont./

as such and entails the sanction related above. But the wife has the absolute right, even in her husband's absence, to break the contract unilaterally by taking back to the bad of her husband's lineage the objects left with her. From this moment on, no more can be said to her, she is no longer guilty of adultery, and she can take another husband forthwith; in case of the first husband's death she will not have to stand the eight of the mourning. All that her husband has made for her: house, boat, etc... is kept without counterpart.

No Boni leaving on a three-month trip is sure of finding his wife again. He may very well find another man installed in his place, officially, without his being able to say anything. As for those who leave for a long time, this is practically a certainty.

This is a misfortune which however they take philosophically, thinking above all of the work furnished for nothing. What concerns them most is not to be deceived clandestinely, for the final result is the same: they are practically obliged to repudiate the wife in such a case, for it is unworthy of a man to forgive, and in addition they will be the laughing-stock of the population.

Several of our boatmen made the following speech to their wives at the time of leaving for a two-month [illegible] you have enough of me in my absence, if you cannot wait for me, go and take my belongings to the house of such-and-such a brother; I shall not be angry and will not do anything to you on my return."

Custom is so favorable to the women that practically nothing guarantees the private contract made between the man and woman at the time of marriage. Since this contract is essentially founded on a material association, the man cutting the clearing and the woman farming it, one might believe that the woman would be held to fulfilling her contract even in case of the marriage's breaking up, but there is nothing of the sort.

/154 cont./

●586 As far as the clearing already cut and planted is concerned, if it is on the land of the wife's family, the man can demand nothing. However, some women continue to furnish couac for a year after breaking up.

If the clearing is on the husband's lands, the woman continues to farm it normally. But she is required to furnish [593] food as if there had been no rupture. This is why men who do [241] not trust their wives insist on cutting the clearing on land of their own lineage.

Many women wait to divorce their husbands until after they have cut the year's clearing! In January, 1957, upon the return of the border-fixing mission from the southern frontier, /155/ one of us heard M...., a woman of about 40, speak in these terms of her husband T.... 60 years old, who had done everything for her and still used to come to take part in laborious jobs to procure money for her: "He is getting old; I am going to have to look for another."

Observation at Maripasoula, Nov. 5, 1958.

Mastié, boatman of the Maripasoula post, laments in front of his comrades: his wife has just had him notified, without indicating any motive, that she was breaking with him. She did not even disturb herself to tell him so, and she waited until he had finished cutting the year's clearing for her! His [569] comrades once more expressed their rancor against the avarice, spitefulness, and inconstancy of Boni women, inferior beings whom they had once and for all given up trying to understand.

Among the Refugee Blacks people divorce at any age, at 70 years as well as at 18. Thus it is that Captain Dholé (†1951), head of the Dyu lo, and his wife Ela, of the Paalisoo lo, divorced each other about 1940 when both were approaching 70 and had remained together more than 35 years: all growing old their natures no longer hit it off.

/155 cont./

586 [163] Likewise Pééchina, about 70 years old in 1957, separated from Nachinengé (Kotika) after having spent the greatest part of her life with him and having six children by him.

In order to be able to break thus a long standing union without undergoing moral collapse, it is certainly necessary for the affectivity of each one to be entirely centered on his maternal family.

586 124 Frequency of divorce. This essential aspect of the social life of the Refugee Blacks is not easy to lay hold on by direct interrogation. The women do not willingly talk about their past unions and let go in silence the ones which remained childless. However, we were able to reconstitute with rather 586 128 great certainty the past life of about a hundred women (mothers, near relatives, or wives of our most reliable informants). These men /"women" -- printing error. -- Tr./ are marked with a double asterisk ** in the population list of the villages.

[178] It is useful to classify them by age groups relating to the year of birth, for we shall see that the frequency of divorce seems to have increased with time. The groups chosen are the same as for the demographic investigation which we carried on parallel to the sociological study:

/155 cont./

• 586
162

Women born from	0 Div.	1 Div.	2 Div.	3 Div.	4 Div.	Irregular Life	Total
1926 to 1935 incl.	13	8	8	0	0	2	31
1916 to 1925 incl.	9	7	10	1	0	3	30
1896 to 1915 incl.	1	12	6	3	0	1	23
before 1896	3	9	5	1	2	(?)	20
						Total....	104

/156/ Supposing that divorces are regularly spaced through the course of life, and that they cease at about the age of 65 on the average, one can arrive at an estimate of the average number of divorces in store for a Boni woman at old age.

Women born from	Average Age End 1957	Average No. Divorces	Probable No. by Age 65
1926 to 1935 incl.	27 years	0.8 in 10 years(1)	3.8
1916 to 1925	37 years	1.0 in 17 years	2.8
1896 to 1915	52 years	1.5 in 32 years	2.1
before 1896	70 years		1.5 (?)

[582]

1. The average age at marriage is 17 for this group of women, 20 for the earlier group.

/156 cont./

586 The estimate of the average number of divorces for women
[128] born before 1896 is probably lower than the actual number, their first divorces not being well known to our informants. It is probably in the neighborhood of two.

586 The increase in frequency of divorces among young women
593 is striking. It is related to the weakening of the authority, very
178 strong in former times, exercised by mothers over their daughters.

Here are two examples concerning two girls we have known since their childhood.

836 Lomé (L2, F74, Boniville) born in 1938, began to cause people to talk about her in 1954. She was deflowered by N...., who did not want to marry her. Then she had relations with Asadam (K, Boniville), who did not want to marry her either. She was beaten; she continued to see him. Now this is extreme-
[558] ly shameful for a girl because it is placing herself in a state of inferiority with respect to a man, when her self-respect consists in making a contract between equals.

582 Her brother Amkmbé beat her, and she ended up by
586 marrying Pitipiti (Aw.B.2, Asisi village), who formally asked
589 for her in marriage in 1956. This marriage lasted less than a year. In 1957 Lomé divorced him to marry Djoni (Kotika village).

584 Aguba (D u, G14), girl of Asisi-Dju village, born in 1941,
had been proposed to with the customary formalities in May,
1956 by Paltiki (L2, Loka village), a young man of 18. It was
584 agreed that the engaged couple would wait two years. But
585 Paltiki did not wait and consummated the marriage clandestine-
[429] ly at the end of a few months. Langa, Aguba's aunt and guardian, became very angry and beat her. She did not give her the [illegible] until May, 1957. The marriage lasted only a few
586 months. /157/ By the end of 1957 Aguba was breaking off with Paltiki and beginning openly to look for adventures.

/157 cont./

586 If one considers all Boni women together without any age distinctions, one can estimate that on the average they have been divorced 2.5 times during the course of their lives between 18 and 65 years of age. The average duration of marriages (not counting unions broken by the death of one of the spouses) could be evaluated, for the period before 1950, at about 15 years. It tends to decrease in proportion as a generation brought up under less strict discipline reaches adulthood (1).

[178]

1. Doctor Etienne Bois, revising in September, 1960 our card file stopped at the end of November, 1958, recorded for the villages on the French bank 28 divorces which had taken place in the course of this period of 1.8 years. The number of women of marriageable age in these villages being about 160, this figure corresponds to 0.1 divorce per woman and per year, or to an average duration of unions of about 10 years.

[142]

[158] [illegible] women. It appears that most wives are faithful to their husbands for the duration of the union. But since they have the possibility of breaking this union with no need of authorization by anybody whatever, they leave their husband very readily, whether they have stopped liking him or whether they intend to marry a richer man.

/197 cont./

589 A woman who has not been divorced does not remarry
[589] immediately. Several months, sometimes a year or more, may go by between two unions, a period during which she thinks only of "living it up," indulging in all the adventures she wishes. This attitude is considered normal, and the elders have nothing to say to her provided that she does not fall into pimade, or cause any scandal, and that the period does not last too long.

• [586] We have cited the example of Agoba, a young girl of 18, who at the end of 1957 had just broken with her husband Paffini /her/ after only one year of living together. "She was living with things who brought her up; she was cutting a small clearing herself. Beyond that, she had no other concern but to indulge in all the adventures she liked. Men used to come to solicit
[834] her favors discreetly, each one reserving his day. From one she would ask for a cornim, from another, soap, kerosene, etc.
[402] Her guardian things used to press her to take another husband, but she could not forbid her to live thus, having given with the /dog/ her freedom as a woman.

[587] She contracted a new marriage in May or June, 1958 after leading an irregular life for more than six months.

834 As a matter of fact, things go on with great discretion. A man is notified in secret by his sister or /female/ cousin that such-and-such a woman noticed him during a dance, that she will await him at her home on such-and-such a night. At night on the river, one perceives boats which pass close to the shore,
[504] advancing silently. In each village there are secondary landings which allow nocturnal visitors to arrive at night without being noticed and to leave again before dawn. /198/

[589] [illegible] woman lacks discretion and if her life is openly dissolute, her mother will beat her and the elders of the village will inflict punishments on her, but she will not be sent away; in no case can anyone be expelled from his natal village.

(19th cent.)

--Imagination, if someone believes himself to be the victim of witchcraft, he must under no circumstances engage in countersorcery or invoke his ancestors against his enemy. He may ask only for the protection of the Nine. It is Odua who will avenge him by means or less killing the evil-doer.

--Violence in any form whatever. It is regarded as a particularly serious offense against the laws of Odua to strike with an armed hand and to make human blood flow (2).

1. That explains the strictness with which the society of the Refugee Blacks insists the right of punishment granted to the wronged husband, who must strike only with bare fists in front of witnesses, never in the back nor on the street. Fear of seeing human blood flow explains the reticence of the Ibos toward armed magical operations.

--Any attack on personal liberty by material or moral coercion; in particular, neither a man nor woman may be constrained to remain in a marriage which has ceased to please him; nobody may be forced to reside here or there.

The forms of magic so popular among West Indians, aimed at capturing a person's love, are for the reason rejected by the Refugee Blacks and considered as a form of rape.

--Any violation of the spirit of the dead, even to ask [illegible] practices, which take on the gravest consequences [illegible] pursued for by custom. The widow must go to the cemetery to pray every day on his parents' grave. Whoever would do that would immediately be considered as suspect.